

STAY SHARP: ECCLESIOLOGY! WHAT IS A CHURCH AND WHY DOES THAT MATTER?

**EFCA Allegheny District
Waterdam Church
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In the past couple of years as we have lived through the COVID pandemic. When we had to shelter-in-place and we could not meet together as the church, we met virtually. What did this mean for the church, the people of God (not a building)? Was virtual church really a church? Is it an acceptable exception during a pandemic? How do we fulfill the mandate “not to forsake our gathering together?” How do we live out the personal, bodily, face-to-face dimension of life together in the church of Jesus Christ? What are the implications to the church being embodied? Now when we can meet together personally, is virtual and more impersonal still a viable option for gathering? Now is an appropriate time to ask these questions, and our Stay Sharp conference is an appropriate time to seek some responses to them, as we revisit the biblical nature, purpose, and function of the church.

INTRODUCTION



Matthew 16:18-19: Jesus:

- ▶ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my **church**, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.“

Matthew 18:17-18: Jesus:

- ▶ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the **church**. And if he refuses to listen even to the **church**, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

1 Timothy 3:14-16: Paul:

- ▶ I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the **church** of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Ephesians 3:20-21: Paul:

- ▶ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the **church** and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

William Willimon, “On Not Meeting People’s Needs at Church,” *Preaching Now* (June 29, 2004), 3.

- ▶ What if the church serves people, not as a market transaction, but because it is the people of God? What if our choir works hard on their anthem, not because they hope you will like it and be inspired by it but because the choir knows that we are called to be a sign, a signal, a foretaste, a Beachhead of God’s kingdom in the world? What if I’m preaching this sermon, not because I think it’s uppermost on your list of weekly wants, but rather because I believe this is what God wants? What is the greatest service the church can render the world? Perhaps the service we render is not necessarily what the world thinks it needs. But the church is not only about meeting my needs but also about rearranging my needs, giving me needs I would never have had had I not come to church.

John G. Stackhouse, Jr., ed. *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 9.

- ▶ When we, the church, are confused about who we are and whose we are, we can become anything and anyone's. We can become a goose-stepping, Hitler-saluting abomination, as we were in the middle of the last century in Germany. We can become a self-righteous, self-centered, and racist boot on the neck of our neighbors, as we were in South Africa until the end of apartheid. We can become a machete-wielding, genocidal horror, as we were in Rwanda just a few years ago. We can become a corpulent, self-important irrelevance, as we are in so much of America today. And we can become a sad, shrunken ghost pining for past glory and influence, as we are in Canada, Britain, and most of Europe.

- ▶ When the church is confused about who it is and whose it is, it can become just another institution, just another collective, just another voluntary society. So we need ecclesiology – the doctrine of the church – to clarify our minds, motivate our hearts, and direct our hands. We need ecclesiology so that we can be who and whose we truly are.

What we will address:

- ▶ The Church In the Present Day
- ▶ The Church: Definition
- ▶ EFCA Statement of Faith: Article 7: The Church
- ▶ Images of the Church
- ▶ “Virtual/Online” Church
- ▶ The Church: Purity and Unity
- ▶ The Church and Discipline
- ▶ Gospel Threats In the Church

What we will not address (sorry!):

- ▶ Various Forms of Church Polity (Government)
- ▶ Congregational Polity in the EFCA
- ▶ Membership in the Local Church and Why It Matters
- ▶ Ordinances: Baptism and the Lord's Supper
- ▶ The Church and Worship
- ▶ Men and Women in the Church: Complementarianism
- ▶ Priesthood and Authority: Rightly Ordered

- ▶ For many/most, this will consist of truths you already know. Consider this to be important reminders.
- ▶ For some, this will be new information. Consider this to be biblical and theological education/equipping.
- ▶ For all, we have now had an experience that does not change the truth (which never changes), but it causes us to consider truth from a different perspective, so we are learning new things.
- ▶ It is important we discuss these matters: we do not seek answers in a return to what was, or we do not move into the future too soon. It is critical to learn what God has for us now.
- ▶ We will discuss some things here (where else can you honestly talk about these issues?), and it will also be fruitful to have these conversations with elders, pastors, and ministry staff.

THE CHURCH IN THE PRESENT DAY



- ▶ What we have experienced the past few years have caused many to wonder if this was and is a unique moment, or if we were just experiencing what life has always been.
- ▶ To make it clear this was and remains a unique time, one writer (Michelle Goldberg in the *NYT*) put the question into perspective in this way. If you look at 2020 and 2021, in one year we experienced the condensing of many years of major historical events. Consider the following:

- ▶ 1974 (an impeachment)
- ▶ 1968 (riots)
- ▶ 1929 (a stock market crash)
- ▶ 1918 (a pandemic)
- ▶ 1975 (fall of Saigon, Afghanistan)
- ▶ 1974 (another impeachment)
- ▶ 1861 (storm the capital to stop the electoral count)

- ▶ We learned a whole new vocabulary related to public health the past three years (and gained a number of expert epidemiologists in our churches).
- ▶ Something else happened. Something that we will not know until we experience a test. And often we don't know why we have a relationship until it is tested. One thing in particular has been and remains troubling.
- ▶ We claimed and concluded our unity was in Christ, both our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and in the church. In living through these past three years and now looking in a rearview mirror, I am not sure our common commitment was Christ.

- ▶ In fact, to continue the driving metaphor, this phenomenon is not just in the review mirror. You can also still see it out your side windows. It saddens me to say that I think that common commitment to Christ actually turned out to be something else. It consisted of things like politics and identity politics and masks and vaccines and fill in the blank. And then when that common unity in politics and understanding the culture and cultural engagement fractured, other things fell apart. And this is the story for many people in this country, and it is, sadly, what many pastors and churches have and still are experiencing.

Fissures and Fractures, Sifting and Sorting, Debates and Divides

- ▶ I have often said that today we are at a similar point to where we have been in the past—whether that is with Spurgeon and the Downgrade Controversy of the latter part of the 19th century), the modernist and fundamentalist divide of the first quarter of last century (Fosdick and Machen), the fundamentalist and neo-evangelical divide of the 1940s, or the Martyn Lloyd-Jones and John Stott divide of the mid-1960s. We are being pressed by evangelical progressives (theological liberals) on the left and neo-fundamentalists on the right. And much of it is over how we understand church and state, Christians and the public square, political involvement, and cultural engagement.

Tim Keller writes (Foreword in Jake Meador, *In Search of the Common Good: Christian Fidelity in a Fractured World* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 1.),

- ▶ “today my church, like so many others, is sharply divided, despite the fact that its ministers can agree on a very long and detailed doctrinal statement, the Westminster standards. So why all the conflict? *It is not as much over doctrine as over what our relationship to the culture should be.* And as I look around, I see this same division roiling Christian denominations and organizations everywhere.” (emphasis mine)

- ▶ Tim Keller, [The Decline and Renewal of the American Church: Part 1 – The Decline of the Mainline](#) (Fall 2021)
- ▶ Tim Keller, [The Decline and Renewal of the American Church: Part 2 – The Decline of Evangelicalism](#) (Winter 2022)
- ▶ Tim Keller, [The Decline and Renewal of the American Church: Part 3 – The Path to Renewal](#) (Spring 2022)
- ▶ Tim Keller, [The Decline and Renewal of the American Church: Part 4 – The Strategy for Renewal](#) (Summer 2022)

Rick Warren, [*Created to Dream: The 6 Phases God Uses to Grow Your Faith*](#) (Harper/Collins, April 2023), identifies five social storms:

- ▶ "global infirmity (Covid), economic insecurity (millions were out of work), social instability (riots and mass shootings), racial inequality (the rise of racism), and political incivility (demonizing opponents)."
- ▶ "The five social storms that have battered us for the past three years have left people fragmented, frustrated, and fatigued. Many are running on fumes. We need a total reset, not a resumption of pre-pandemic life. For that to happen, people need to learn to dream again. But they also need to know how to handle the inevitable delays, difficulties, and dead-ends they'll face before their dream is realized."

Mark Labberton and Steve Norman, [Concerned About the Church's Future?](#), Preaching Today Webinar (March 15, 2023 @ 12:00 PM Central)

- ▶ In recent years, pastors and preachers have asked, “How can the church adapt to unprecedented challenges?” The more alarming question may be, “Will there even be a church left to change?” The recent pandemic, political divisions, racial tension, and a growing number of people who deconstruct the faith are clearly impacting the church's future.
- ▶ We'll explore how preachers can thoughtfully and faithfully wrestle with this question and the implications it has for our preaching.

Ray Ortlund, [Resilient Together: Recovering What the Gospel Creates](#)
(February 24, 2023).

- ▶ We Christians in America today are walking through pressures, temptations, strife, and exhaustion — for starters — such as I have never seen before. We have only one way forward. Our Lord above is calling us to a deeper place with himself *and with one another*. Our times demand shared resilience — steadfastness and solidarity *together*. The worst thing to do right now is drift apart. The best thing to do is strengthen our relationships, for Jesus's sake. Then, *together*, we'll be able to face any future, by God's grace.

Carl R. Trueman, [The Church of the Sexual Revolution: Today's theological fault lines mostly concern matters of earthly morality](#), writes that a challenge to the church the past 50-100 years was the doctrine of God, theology. Today it is the doctrine of humanity, male and female, and what it means to be human, anthropology.

- ▶ There's one more oddity of our present religious woes. Whereas the problems for Christian institutions in the early 20th century might be described as having been a crisis in the understanding of God--could he become incarnate, rise from the dead and reveal himself to his creatures?--the problems of the early 21st century are different in kind.
- ▶ They can be characterized as a crisis in what it means to be human. Are embryos persons? Are sex differences morally significant? Is "gender identity" different from sex? It's ironic that disagreements about the creature may prove more devastating to the church than those about the Creator.

- ▶ Kevin DeYoung, [Is the Church Failing at Being the Church?](#) (January 17, 2023).
- ▶ Kirsten Sanders, [“Why Church?” Is the Wrong Question](#) (February 13, 2023).
- ▶ Michael Reeves, [The Hidden Cancer in Our Churches](#) (February 14, 2023).
- ▶ Trevin Wax, [The Danger of Pursuing a Perfect Church](#) (February 16, 2023).
- ▶ John Stonestreet, [Why So Many Are Choosing Couches Over Pews](#) (February 16, 2023).

Pew Research Center, [Modeling the Future of Religion in America: If recent trends in religious switching continue, Christians could make up less than half of the U.S. population within a few decades](#) (September 13, 2023).

Lindsey Witt-Swanson, Jennifer Benz, Daniel A. Cox, [Faith After the Pandemic: How COVID-19 Changed American Religion: Findings from the 2022 American Religious Benchmark Survey](#) (January 5, 2023).

Carey Nieuwhof, [Future Church: 8 Church Trends to Watch in 2023](#)

The recent CDC report addresses the change in suicide rates, which is the first article below. Looking at some of the specifics, the second article points out sadness and suicide impacts teens in record levels, and significantly affects teen girls. In the third article, it looks at another aspect of teens who are affected and that is those who identify as LGBTQ.

- ▶ Deborah M. Stone, Karin A. Mack, and Judith Qualters, *Notes from the Field: [Recent Changes in Suicide Rates, by Race and Ethnicity and Age Group — United States, 2021](#)* (February 10, 2023). (Cf. also, [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#) (MMWR) Vol. 72 / No. 6 (February 10, 2023):160–162.
- ▶ Sarah Toy, [Teen Girls Experiencing Record Levels of Sadness and Suicide Risk, CDC Says: Teens reported increasing experiences of violence and suicidal thoughts, but girls fared worse than boys](#) (February 13, 2023).
- ▶ Al Mohler, [A Massive Cry for Help: Teen Girls and Youth Who Identify as LGBTQ Wrestle With Record Levels of Sadness](#) (February 15, 2023).

Trevin Wax, “Eternal Stakes, Epic Battle,” chapter 7, in *The Thrill of Orthodoxy: Rediscovering the Adventure of Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2022), 124:

- ▶ NOTHING REMOVES THE THRILL OF ORTHODOXY faster than nonchalance—the shrug of the shoulders toward doctrinal debates and creedal affirmations. Today’s cultural currents sweep us into a sea of indifference where religion only deals with personal values, which renders doctrinal disputes little more than a theological game. Fun to play, but no matter who wins or loses, the board game goes back into the box with nothing gained or lost for good.
- ▶ This attitude is wildly out of step with those who delivered the faith to us. The Christians who went before us believed getting doctrine right was a matter of life or death. The writers and scholars and pastors and monks and missionaries and servants who handed down the gospel believed orthodoxy was the difference between heaven and hell, eternity and nothingness, light and darkness. The stakes were high, not only regarding the beliefs we confess but also the way we comport ourselves in the world.

Trevin Wax, “The Future of Orthodoxy,” chapter 10, in *The Thrill of Orthodoxy: Rediscovering the Adventure of Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2022), 193-194:

- ▶ The future of the church will not be forged by those who tire of the thrill of orthodoxy, but by those whose roots run deep through the ages of the Christian church and back into the pages of God’s inspired Word. The future of the church will not be forged by those who jump on the bandwagon of fads and fashions, who hang on to a passing moment or movement as if it assures success. The future of the church will follow the path of pilgrims who remain empowered by the Spirit, who are thrilled by the discovery and definition of orthodoxy — men and women who can see past the fads and fashions of the day, who have no patience for the narrow-minded heresies that mutilate the Christian faith, who lean fully into the richness of the truth they’ve inherited and will pass on to the next generation. The future of the church belongs to those who want to scale the mountain, who yearn to become more like Christ, who rely on the Spirit for salvation and sanctification, as we are made anew into the image of the one who saves us. The future of the church depends on the thrill of orthodoxy.

- ▶ And what will that future look like? A throng of once-sinners now-saints gathered around a throne, lifting our voices in perfect pitch to praise the One who is both Lion and Lamb, joining the endless song of all the angels and powers of heaven. “Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,” we will sing, “heaven and earth are full of your glory.” With the glorious company of apostles, and noble fellowship of prophets, and the white-robed army of martyrs, we will testify to the majesty of the Father, the worth of his only begotten Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit, our advocate and guide. In that never-ending moment of acclamation—seeing Jesus Christ exalted, the king of glory who did not shun the virgin’s womb—we will look back on all our sufferings and tribulations, our sorrows and sins, and see them swept up and set within the tapestry of God’s eternal plan. And all our paltry attempts to express the inexpressible, all the foolishness of humanity’s errors and heresies, will crumple before the solid reality of the Triune God who saves and sanctifies.

Mark E. Dever, “The Church,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (B&H, 2007), 766-767.

- ▶ The doctrine of the church is of the utmost importance. A theology for the church would be incomplete without a theology of the church. . . . It is the most visible part of Christian theology, and it is vitally connected with every other part. A distorted church usually coincides with a distorted gospel. . . . This is not to say that all differences in ecclesiology are tantamount to differences over the gospel itself.
- ▶ Perhaps the popular disinterest in ecclesiology results from the understanding that the church itself is not necessary for salvation. Cyprian of Carthage may have said, ‘No one can have God for his father, who has not the church for his mother,’ but few would agree with this sentiment today. . . . And emphasizing salvation by faith alone, evangelical Protestants certainly have even less use for the church, much less for studying the doctrine of the church.

- ▶ However, the church should be regarded as important to Christians because of its importance to Christ. Christ founded the church (Matt. 16:18), purchased it with his blood (Acts 20:28), and intimately identifies himself with it (Acts 9:4). The church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:23; 4:12; 5:23-32; Col. 1:18,24; 3:15; 1 Cor. 12:12-27), the dwelling place of his Spirit (Rom. 8:9,11,16; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:11,15-17; Eph. 2:18,22; 4:4), and the instrument for glorifying God in the world. Finally, the church is God's instrument for bringing both the gospel to the nations and a great host of redeemed humanity to himself (Rev. 5:9)."
- ▶ Present-day errors in the understanding and the practice of the church will, if they prevail, still further obscure the gospel. Christian proclamation might make the gospel audible, but Christians living together in local congregations make the gospel visible (see John 13:34-35). The church is the gospel made visible.

Questions:

- ▶ What are a few of the significant challenges you/we face in the church? Begin in your own local church before identifying the challenges encountered more broadly in the EFCA or even more broadly still in Evangelicalism (which is a sub-category of the else's challenges).
- ▶ COVID Pandemic (March 2020): What issues did it create in and for the church, and what issues did it reveal?

THE CHURCH: DEFINITION



- ▶ Far too many people define the church by her function, which will have profound implications for determining whether or not the church is "successful" or not. Time and again this is the problem with pastors and churches. We must understand the nature of the church as the people of God (1 Pet. 2:9-10), the church of Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:18) and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). The church does have a function, but her function is rooted in her nature.
- ▶ This statement illustrates the biblical reality of the church: "The church is. The church does what it is. The church organizes what it does. The nature of the church is based on God's presence through the Spirit. The ministry of the church flows out of the church's nature. The organization of the church is designed to support the ministry of the church." (Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000, p. 37.)

- ▶ "The church is." This describes the nature of the church as a divine creation, brought into being through the ministry of the triune God. This is critical to understand or we will end up understanding the church like a social club or some other organization, not a divinely created organism.
- ▶ "The church does what it is." Based on the church's nature, it will engage in certain activities and ministries. This would be summarized in the purpose of the church, viz. to glorify God in worship, nurture and outreach. But, importantly, all of these need to be filtered back through the grid of what the church is to ensure it is God-honoring and Christ-exalting. At best this is where many begin to think about the church, either assuming the nature of the church or being ignorant about it.

- ▶ “The church organizes what it does.” This gets at the structure of the church, beginning with the elders and the deacons/nesses. This simply recognizes that we need to be wise and discerning about how most effectively to carry out the God-ordained ministries to which we have been called rooted in her nature and purpose. This is where many pastors, leaders and churches are spending their time and energy today, and in most instances, those focusing on this piece do so without an awareness of the God-ordained nature and purpose of the church.

Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (IVP, 1995), 72-73.

- ▶ Viewing the church in terms of the gospel helps us to see how the various descriptions fit together. The church is apostolic, because it is founded on the apostolic gospel and called to fulfill the apostolic mission. The holiness of the church means that life, as well as truth, marks Christ's church; the behavior of Christians in the world must be remarkable enough to cause grudging admiration, astonished curiosity or threatening hostility (1 Pet. 2:12; 3:16; Jn. 15:18). The unity of the church requires a new community, joined in a common faith and life. The catholic character of the church flows from the fact that the church is a colony of heaven; it cannot conform to the social castes and sectarian goals that divide a fallen world, for it is the beginning of the new humanity in Christ.

- ▶ The heavenly definition of the church explains the contrasts of its existence in time (*militant/triumphant*) and space (*local/universal*), as well as the perspectives of earth and heaven (*visible/invisible*). The distinction between the church as *organization* and *organism* describes how the church is to live in both the ardour and the order of the Spirit.

- ▶ The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to create/birth the people of God! John Stott has written (*Between Two Worlds* [Eerdmans, 1982], 109), “the church is the creation of God by his Word. . . . God’s new creation (the church) is as dependent upon his Word as his old creation (the universe). Not only has he brought it into being by his Word, but he maintains it through the same Word.”
- ▶ The Catholic Church believes it was the church that created the Word, whereas we as Protestant evangelicals believe that “God’s Word has always created his people!” (Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Crossway, 2000), 29).

The Triune God, the Gospel, and the Church

- ▶ The *People of God* (Ezek. 36:24-28; 1 Pet. 2:9-10)
- ▶ The *Body of Christ* (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:20-23; 5:23)
- ▶ The *Temple of the Holy Spirit* (Ezek. 36:24-28; 1 Cor. 3:16-17)

Jesus Christ and the Church

1. Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Eph. 5:25).
2. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone/capstone of the church (Eph. 2:20).
3. Jesus promises he will build his church and the gates of hell will not overcome it (Matt. 16:18; cf. Acts 2:47). He rules and reigns from his Father's right hand as King, Lord of our lives, and Head of the Church, and that heavenly rule is exercised in the earthly local church in/through the Word of God, the Scriptures (with the Holy Spirit's inspiration, illumination, and conformity into the image of the Son).
4. The church has come "to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly [church] of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God . . . and to Jesus" (Heb. 12:22-24).
5. This heavenly church awaits the return of Christ and its future reality as "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2).

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed., “The Nature of the Church: Definition”, 1047:

- ▶ There are at least two possible definitions of the church, and these two definitions differ over whether the people of God in the Old Testament should be considered part of the church. The definition that seems preferable to me is this: *the church is the community of all true believers for all time*. The other definition is this: the church is the community of all true believers since Pentecost. According to this second definition, the church does not include true believers during the time of the Old Testament.

- ▶ **1. Definition:** The church is the community of all true believers for all time (Eph. 1:22-23, 5:25; Matt. 16:18, Deut 4:10, Acts 7:38, Heb. 12:22-23).
- ▶ **2. The Church Is Invisible, Yet Visible:** The *invisible church* is the church as God sees it (1 Tim 2.19; 1 Sam 16.7). The *visible church* is the church as Christians on earth see it (1 Cor. 1:2; Philm 1-2). The visible church will always include unbelievers (Acts 20:29-30; Matt 7.15-16).
- ▶ **3. The Church Is Local and Universal:** In the New Testament, the word "church" may be applied to a group of believers at any level, ranging from a very small group meeting in a private home to all true believers in the universal church. (cf. Rom. 16:5, 1 Cor. 1:2; Acts 9:31, 1 Cor. 12:28)

Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 62

- ▶ Specifically, these gatherings may be part of the church in a particular city that assembles regularly together in members' homes – for example, the house of Prisca and Aquila (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19), the house of Nympha (Col. 4:15), Philemon's house (Philem. 2), and Mary's house (Acts 12:12). These smaller gatherings were also called churches, but so were the whole church gatherings (1 Cor. 11:17, 18, 20, 33; e.g., the 'whole church' that Gaius hosted, Rom. 16:23), possibly a reference to the 'city' churches from which these assemblies were distributed: 'the church of the Thessalonians' (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1) or 'the church of God that is at Corinth' (1 Cor. 1:1-2; cf. 2 Cor. 1:1).

EFCA Statement of Faith, Article 8, The Church: *Evangelical Convictions*:

- ▶ The **True Church** Comprises All Who Have Been Justified by God's Grace Through Faith Alone in Christ Alone.
- ▶ The **True Church** Comprises Those United by the Spirit into the Body of Christ of Which He Is the Head.
- ▶ A **Local Church** Is A Visible Community Manifesting the True Church in the World.
- ▶ **Local Church** Membership Should be Composed Only of Believers.
- ▶ The Ordinances (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) Are Mandated by the Lord Jesus.
- ▶ The Ordinances Visibly and Tangibly Express the Gospel.
- ▶ **God's Gospel Is Now Embodied in the New Community Called the Church.**

The True Church

- ▶ The true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone who are united by the Spirit into the body of Christ of which he is the Head. (EFCA SOF, Article 7).
- ▶ First, the Bible speaks of the church as the totality of all those united with Christ by faith, resulting in a new standing before God and a new relationship with one another. In this sense, Paul can say that "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25) and that Christ is the Savior of "the church" (Eph. 5:23; cf. also 1:22-23). We refer to this as the "true" church, for it is a community ultimately known only to God, for only God can know the depths of the human heart. Only he can perceive with absolute certainty whether the faith that is professed is truly believed. We may consider the composition of the true church from two perspectives. (*Evangelical Convictions*)

The Local Church: A Visible Community Manifesting the True Church in the World

- ▶ One can speak of the church as a body known only to God, for in an ultimate sense only God knows those who are truly his. [true or universal church] But generally in the New Testament, the church refers to a community visible in the world. And though the term can refer to the community of Christians within a large geographical area (cf. Acts 9:31 – “the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria.” For the more common use, cf. 1 Cor. 16:19 – “The churches in the province of Asia” (also 1 Cor. 16:1)), it more commonly denotes a local gathering of believers in one place (e.g., “Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house” (1 Cor. 16:19, or “when you come together as a church” (1 Cor. 11:18)). Here in this local network of relationships the gospel is embodied in the world and worked out in our lives.

- ▶ This definition primarily focuses on the purposes of the church, i.e., it is a functional definition, but it also includes a brief statement on the divine origin of the church, i.e., theological, all of it grounded in the Scriptures and much of it guided by our SOF.
- A local church is a fellowship of believers, predestined by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who agree together under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and called and gifted leaders to meet regularly, to be instructed and formed by the Word of God, to celebrate the ordinances, to use their spiritual gifts for the building up of the body, and to proclaim and live out the gospel.

Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, “Basic Idea of the Church,” pp. 29-30”

- ▶ The church is the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit. It consists of two interrelated elements: the universal church is the fellowship of all Christians that extends from the day of Pentecost until the second coming, incorporating both the deceased believers who are presenting in heaven and the living believers from all over the world.

- ▶ This universal church becomes manifested in local churches characterized by being doxological, logocentric, pneumadynamic, covenantal, confessional, missional, and spatio-temporal/eschatological. Local churches are led by pastors (also called elders) and served by deacons, possess and pursue purity and unity, exercise discipline, develop strong connections with other churches, and celebrate the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Equipped by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts for ministry, these communities regularly gather to worship the triune God, proclaim his Word, engage non-Christians with the gospel, disciple their members, care for people through prayer and giving, and stand both for and against the world.

Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman, *Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ Is Essential* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 26:

- ▶ A church is a group of Christians
- ▶ who assemble as an earthly assembly of Christ's heavenly kingdom
- ▶ to proclaim the good news and commands of Christ the King
- ▶ to affirm one another as his citizens through the ordinances
- ▶ and to display God's own holiness and love
- ▶ through a unified diverse people
- ▶ in all the world
- ▶ following the teaching and example of elders.

Nicene-Constantinople Creed (381)

“. . . We believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church.”

We believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

This is a corporate confession made by all those who comprise the Church of Jesus Christ. Although people enter into the Church individually through new birth, they enter into the corporate Church family. In our day of individualism and privatization, the corporate component of the Church must be re-emphasized.

We **believe** one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We certainly do not believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit the same way in which we believe in the Church. However, belief in God in all His fullness and all that belief entails is the basis for the new birth, which is the basis of becoming a part of and believing in the Church. The Church is not first and foremost a sociological phenomenon but a new creation by God the Holy Spirit. In our day, it is essential to remember that these truths have been revealed by God, and they must be believed.

Do we believe in the church in the same way we believe in God the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit? The English translation is confusing and misleading as it adds “in” before the marks.

Credo in unum Deum Patrem omnipotentem . . . et in unum Dominum Iesum Christum . . . et in Spiritum Sanctum . . . et unam, sanctum, catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam

“We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty . . . and in one Lord, Jesus Christ . . . and in the Holy Spirit . . . and [in] one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.”

In essence we are saying that we do not believe in the church in the same way/manner we believe in God, Son and Holy Spirit who create the church.

Angelo Di Berardino, ed., *We Believe in One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church*, 5, Ancient Christian Doctrine (IVP Academic, 2010).

Nature or Attributes of the Church

We believe **one** holy catholic and apostolic Church.

This spiritual community created by the Holy Spirit is one. There is a unity among these people who comprise the Church. As the Father and the Son are one, so those who are part of the Church are one with the Father and the Son, and with one another. This is confessed as a “*communion of saints.*”

Texts: Eph. 4:1-6 (cf. Jn. 10:16; 17:11, 20-23; 1 Cor. 1:10-17)

We believe one ***holy*** catholic and apostolic Church.

Rooted in the holy character of God, those He creates anew are also holy. Those who are part of the church are holy in two respects. They are holy by virtue of being united to Christ and set apart for Him. They are also holy in behavior in that they take on the holiness of their Head, Jesus Christ. This is confessed as a “communion of *saints*.”

Texts: 1 Pet. 2:4-10 (cf. Isa. 6:3; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 1 Pet. 1:13-16)

We believe one holy ***catholic*** and apostolic Church.

God promised that all the nations would be blessed through Abraham, and this promise was fulfilled in Christ and all those who now by faith believe in Him. God is drawing a people to Himself that crosses all social, racial and intellectual boundaries, a church that is universal in scope. Although being a part of the Church is exclusive, only through Jesus, membership is universal in that the church exists globally and it is made up of people from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Texts: Col. 1:15-20 (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 1:21-23; Rev. 5:9-10)

We believe one holy catholic and ***apostolic*** Church.

The teaching of Jesus was faithfully passed on by the apostles. Since Jesus Christ is the Church's Head, she is dependent upon the faithful teaching of the apostles. This is a truth once for all entrusted to the saints. This is a message to be proclaimed, which is at the heart of the missional thrust of the Church.

Texts: Eph. 2:11-22 (esp. vv. 19-22; cf. 3:5)

We believe one holy catholic and apostolic ***Church***.

Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Church, has promised that He will build His Church.

Texts: Heb. 12:18-24 (esp. vv. 22-24; cf. Matt. 16:18)

Justification by faith is the ‘article by which the church stands or falls’ (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*) – Martin Luther

“Literally, the article of the standing and falling of the church; i.e., the article of Christian doctrine necessary to the life and perpetuation of the church; a phrase used by Luther and thereafter, especially by Lutheran theologians, to describe the doctrine of justification.” *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Baker, 1985), 46.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Chapter 44: The Church: Its Nature, Its Marks, and Its Purposes

The Marks of the Church (Distinguishing Characteristics)

1. Pure preaching of the Word
2. Right administration of the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper).

Today he would add a couple of other challenges/questions:

1. The challenge/question of parachurches attempting to function as a church.
2. The challenge/question of true and false churches.

The Purposes of the Church

1. Ministry to God: Worship (Col. 3:16).
2. Ministry to Believers: Nurture (Eph. 4:11-13).
3. Ministry to the World: Evangelism and Mercy (Matt. 28:18-20, Luke 6:35-36).

It is important to keep these purposes in balance.

John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 11.)

- ▶ “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.”

Emil Brunner, Swiss Reformed theologian, associated with neo-orthodoxy or the dialectical theology (1889-1966):

- ▶ The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.

Questions:

- ▶ Grounding your reflections in the Scriptures, and being guided by your experience in the church, provide a definition of the church, its origin, nature, and purpose.
- ▶ Please also list some things the church is not that many think/assume/conclude it is. In other words, what are some inaccurate understandings of the church's origin, nature, and purpose?

EFCA STATEMENT OF FAITH

ARTICLE 7: THE CHURCH



In our Articles of Incorporation, Article II, Objectives, it states the following about the organizing structure of this association:

- A. The Evangelical Free Church of America shall be an association and fellowship of autonomous but interdependent congregations of like faith and congregational government whose purpose shall be to glorify God through obedience to the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ by bringing individuals to personal faith in Christ and helping them toward maturity in Him.

The Church

7. We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

God's gospel is now embodied in the new community called the church.

- ▶ But God in his grace has purposed to restore his fallen creation and to redeem a people for himself. In Jesus Christ God has acted to rescue sinful human beings from his wrath and to reconcile them to himself. This work of Christ in his cross and resurrection is now applied to us by the Holy Spirit, who unites us with Christ so that what is true of him becomes true of us. And in uniting us with Christ, the Spirit also creates a new community we call the church. The church, as those saved by God's grace and united with Christ by God's Spirit, becomes the embodiment of the gospel in the world.

I. The Nature of the Church

A. The True Church

1. The True Church Comprises All Who Have Been Justified by God's Grace Through Faith Alone in Christ Alone

I. The Nature of the Church

A. The True Church

1. The True Church Comprises All Who Have Been Justified by God's Grace Through Faith Alone in Christ Alone
2. The True Church Comprises Those United by the Spirit into the Body of Christ of Which He Is the Head

B. The Local Church

1. A Visible Community Manifesting the True Church in the World

B. The Local Church

1. A Visible Community Manifesting the True Church in the World
2. Local Church Membership Should be Composed Only of Believers

II. The Ordinances of the Church

A. The Nature of the Ordinances

1. Their Source: The Ordinances Are Mandated by the Lord Jesus

II. The Ordinances of the Church

A. The Nature of the Ordinances

1. Their Source: The Ordinances Are Mandated by the Lord Jesus
2. Their Purpose: The Ordinances Visibly and Tangibly Express the Gospel

2. Their Purpose: The Ordinances Visibly and Tangibly Express the Gospel

a. The Ordinances Are Not the Means of Salvation

b. When Celebrated by the Church in Genuine Faith The Ordinances Confirm and Nourish the Believer

We recognize that the interpretations of Scripture on the relevant points regarding the two positions on baptism differ with one another and are in some ways incompatible. We allow different interpretations, not because we think Scripture is intrinsically ambiguous on the matter, nor because we think Scripture provides so little information that it is unwise to hold any opinion, but because some of us think the credobaptist position is in line with Scripture and that the paedobaptist position is mistaken, and some think the paedobaptist position is in line with Scripture and that the exclusively credobaptist position is mistaken. In other words, both sides hold that Scripture speaks to the matter, but each side holds a view that excludes the other. However, we do not believe that our differing views on this matter (among others) should prevent our unity in the gospel in full local church fellowship. It is in this sense, and only in this sense, that the Statement of Faith "allows" both views.

B. A Description of the Ordinances

1. Baptism

a. Baptism as a Believer's Profession

b. Baptism as the Church's Affirmation

c. Baptism as God's Promise

d. Baptism and the Holy Spirit

2. The Lord's Supper

a. The Lord's Supper Is a Remembrance of Christ's Death

b. The Lord's Supper Is a Communion with Christ's Life

c. The Lord's Supper Is a Fellowship in Christ's Body

d. The Lord's Supper Is a Foretaste of Christ's Coming

C. A Summary of the Ordinances

In summary, our EFCA Statement on the ordinances affirms:

1. Christ has given his church two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the practice of these ordinances is an essential distinguishing mark of a church;
2. these ordinances are signs, that is, visible and tangible expressions, of the gospel, and as such they serve to strengthen our faith—
"confirming and nourishing the believer";

3. the signs (water in baptism, the bread and grape juice or wine in the Lord's Supper) must be distinguished from what they signify (God's saving work in the gospel and Christ's presence with us);
4. the practice of these ordinances does not save us, and we receive spiritual benefit from them only when they are celebrated in "genuine faith" in Christ.
5. the ordinances serve to separate the believer from the world and to give a visible designation of those who belong to the body of Christ.

Our Statement denies that:

1. either baptism in water or participating in the Lord's Supper is the instrumental cause of regeneration;
2. the grace of God is automatically and effectually conveyed through the administration of the ordinances themselves.

III. Conclusion: The Church and the Gospel

- ▶ God's gospel is now embodied in the new community called the church. This means not only that the gospel creates the church, but also that the church proclaims the gospel. And the church proclaims the gospel not simply in what the church is called to do,⁸⁰ but in what the church is.
- ▶ The church is the centerpiece of God's purposes for humanity. For the promise of the gospel is that God will redeem a people composed of those from every nation, tribe, people and language who will find their unity solely in their common relationship with Jesus Christ as they are united to him by the Spirit (cf. Rev. 5:9; 7:9). And it is in the church that this people-to-come is now being made visible to the world.

- ▶ The church is the “first fruits” of what is to come. As one writer put it, “The church does communicate to the world what God plans to do, because it shows that God is beginning to do it.” In Christ a new age has dawned, and the church is to be an anticipatory presence of that new age and an initial signpost of its coming.
- ▶ The church is not just the bearer of the message of reconciliation, the church is a part of the message itself. The church’s existence as a community reconciled to God and to one another is what gives the message its credibility, for such a community is itself the manifestation of the gospel it proclaims.

- ▶ In Evangelicalism broadly and the EFCA specifically, often people emphasize soteriology and not ecclesiology. Because of our EFCA history originating in revivalism, soteriology is often emphasized with little connection to ecclesiology. Additionally, because of a fear of the Roman Catholic (mis)understanding of the church, it becomes something in which we affirm by what we are against, thus severing any connection at all between soteriology and ecclesiology.
- ▶ For sure, soteriology and ecclesiology are not one and the same, but they are organically related. Soteriology is the ground and ecclesiology is the goal. God's purpose in salvation (soteriology) is to redeem a people (ecclesiology) for himself for his own glory. That people is the church. Too often people have a weak ecclesiology, so they conclude all that matters is soteriology. That is more an emphasis of a parachurch than a church. The Pastoral Epistles address both the church and the structure in the church. As I will often say, any Acts Pentecost/revival phenomenon will result in a PE structure.

Trevin Wax, [Why the Gospel Community is Essential to Understanding the Gospel:](#)

- ▶ “If you excise the gospel community from your thinking about the gospel announcement, you gut the gospel of its purpose. Though the church is not the subject of the gospel announcement (Christ alone is the subject, of course), the church is a necessary object. Christ’s death has a purpose: to save sinners and incorporate them into a community that reflects His glory.”
- ▶ “the gospel has a *telos* – the purpose of calling out a people, which is why I want to keep “gospel community” close to the announcement. I fear that most evangelicals see the church as ‘just an implication of the gospel’ instead of thinking, This is the whole point of the good news – God forming a people for His glory and the good of the world.”

- ▶ “The gospel announcement of Jesus Christ must be understood within the context of the story that gives it meaning. This announcement then births the gospel community. Saying the good news is limited to the gospel announcement is like saying, “The good news is that the adoption papers are signed” without a view to the purpose of the papers – to incorporate an orphan into a family! We can say all day long that becoming part of the family is the implication of the adoption process, not the process itself. But to make that point too forcefully risks losing the point of it all.
- ▶ “Christ’s death and resurrection completes the transaction of the gospel, yes. But the purpose of Christ’s work is that, in union with Him, we would be reconciled to the Father and adopted into His family.
- ▶ “Good news all around! So, let’s make sure that in our thinking and speaking about the centrality of the gospel announcement we not leave out the gospel-formed family. Otherwise, we gut the gospel of its purpose.”

Questions:

- ▶ What are some reasons evangelicals have generally been strong on the doctrine (and practice of) soteriology, but weak on the doctrine of ecclesiology?
- ▶ Why is it important to study these two doctrines separately? How are they different and how are they related/connected? Why is it essential to understand them as part of an organic whole?
- ▶ What is the connection between the gospel and the church? What is the relationship between soteriology and ecclesiology?
- ▶ Is the church the plural of Christian? Or is it an authorized community with delegated authority of the King to show what the kingdom of God is like?

IMAGES OF THE CHURCH

Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*



II. Minor Images of the Church

1. The salt of the earth
2. A letter from Christ
3. Fish and fish net
4. The boat
5. The ark
6. Unleavened bread
7. One loaf
8. The table of the Lord
9. The altar
10. The cup of the Lord
11. Wine
12. Branches of the vine
13. Vineyard
14. The fig tree
15. The olive tree
16. God's planting

II. Minor Images of the Church

17. God's building
18. Building on the rock
19. Pillar and buttress
20. Virgins
21. The Messiah's mother
22. The elect lady
23. The bride of Christ
24. The wedding feast
25. Wearers of white robes
26. The choice of clothing
27. Citizens
28. Exiles
29. The Dispersion
30. Ambassadors
31. The poor
32. Hosts and guests

III. The People of God

33. The people of God

34. Israel

35. A chosen race

36. A holy nation

37. Twelve tribes

38. The patriarchs

39. Circumcision

40. Abraham's sons

41. The exodus

42. House of David

43. Remnant

44. The elect

45. Flock

46. Lambs who rule

47. The Holy City

48. The holy temple

49. Priesthood

50. Sacrifice

51. Aroma

52. Festivals

IV. The New Creation

- 53. The new creation
- 54. First fruits
- 55. The new humanity
- 56. The last Adam
- 57. The Son of Man
- 58. The Kingdom of God
- 59. Fighters against Satan
- 60. Sabbath Rest
- 61. The coming age
- 62. God's glory
- 63. Light
- 64. The name
- 65. Life
- 66. The tree of life
- 67. Communion in the Holy Spirit
- 68. The bond of love

V. The Fellowship in Faith

- 69. The sanctified
- 70. The faithful
- 71. The justified
- 72. Followers
- 73. Disciples
- 74. Road
- 75. Coming and going
- 76. Witnessing community
- 77. Confessors
- 78. Slaves
- 79. Friends
- 80. Servants
- 81. “with...”
- 82. Edification
- 83. Household of God
- 84. Sons of God
- 85. Brotherhood

VI. The Body of Christ

- 86. The body of life
- 87. Members of Christ
- 88. The body and the blood
- 89. The diversities of ministries
- 90. Spiritual body
- 91. Head of cosmic spirits
- 92. Head of the church
- 93. The body of this head
- 94. The unity of Jews and Gentiles
- 95. The growth of the body
- 96. The fullness of God

“VIRTUAL” (“ONLINE”) CHURCH





Questions:

- ▶ Based on your biblical understanding of the church, how shall we understand the notion of “virtual” (now “online”) church? Does it qualify biblically as a church? Why or why not?
- ▶ How should we biblically discern the notion of virtually celebrating the Lord’s Supper alone or with family/others?
- ▶ Specifically, you have been informed (not asked) by someone who had been a member (or regular attender) of the church who has now decided to become part of the “virtual” (online) church. How would you respond? What are the issues you considered in formulating your response?

- ▶ One can say with certainty two issues. First, the New Testament does not address a virtual church. Second, the New Testament does not address celebrating the ordinances, in particular the Lord's Supper or Communion, virtually. This does not necessarily make virtual church and virtually celebrating the ordinances unbiblical, but it should give us pause.
- ▶ It is clear the New Testament does not understand the church in this way, and neither does the New Testament prescribe, or even mention, practicing the Lord's Supper in this way. (It would seem baptism is different in that the one being baptized has to be present to be physically baptized by someone. But then again, is that absolutely necessary? Could one experience a virtual baptism while being "baptized" by one leading online?)

- ▶ With these clear certainties as the normal practice, an expression of being a “rightly ordered” church, how might or should these truths be understood and/or expressed in extraordinary days, such as today during COVID-19 when the church cannot gather? Do extraordinary days give permission (certainly not mandate) to engage as the people of God in extraordinary means as we seek to live out the faith faithfully, not only individually but also corporately.
- ▶ What biblical mandates, permissions, and differences, if any, are there between the individual Christian and the corporate Christian church as we live out the faith faithfully? Regarding the corporately gathered church, what are the clear commands that we must affirm and obey (regulative principle) and what is not expressly or explicitly forbidden by Scripture that is allowed or permitted (normative). How does this corporately gathered church function online, specifically in celebrating the ordinances?

Future Corporate Gatherings of the Church Family: A Few Principles and Practices to Ponder Prayerfully

- ▶ As you have this discussion as a church, begin by asking what will remain and what will go away with how we have gathered and functioned as a church virtually? How do we use this unique experience and opportunity given by God to form new life groups, to add more ministries, to expand our ministry online? What do we learn from this experience?
- ▶ Let me suggest one foundational question: “What did we learn about the fundamental nature of the church, i.e., what/who the church is?” This will lay the groundwork for you to approach the four questions you raise about what the church ought to be doing. But the doing (ministries or functions) is grounded in the being (what and what the people of God are, e.g., 1 Pet. 2:9-10).
- ▶ As we begin to think about what meeting again means after the stay-at-home orders, I think the Lord is giving us an opportunity to realign (in some ways a do-over) based on not what we did and what we should do, but based on the fundamental nature of the church, and then allowing that to determine the questions of what the church ought to do. My sense is that there are too many assumptions about what the church is, and then we quickly move on to focus on what the church ought to do. My sense is that we ought to focus on the former and allow that to ground, guard and guide our purpose and mission into the future. This will allow (force?) us to consider how to be the church and to live out faithfully the mission of the church in a post-modern, post-Christian day, in which our culture is becoming increasingly secular. As the people of God consider being faithful, it must not be the same old, same old. Through God’s sweet sovereignty and his bitter providence, through his severe mercy, we now have this wonderful opportunity before us.

Kirsten Sanders, [Why Church?' Is the Wrong Question: Private devotion, community service, and entertainment aren't what the local congregation is for.](#) (February 13, 2023).

- ▶ One question I encounter regularly these days is why the local church matters. This, I think, is the wrong question.
- ▶ Disaffected Christians want to know why they should attend church when it has sheltered so much harm. Pastors and leaders want to know how to communicate to others, especially young adults, what good the church has to offer.
- ▶ We are in a crucible that should burn off wrong answers about the church. Two years of pandemic-related church shutdowns has led many congregations to move their worship online. Church services were livestreamed and accessed in people's living rooms. Communion was sometimes taken at the kitchen table, or not at all. Music was streamed virtually. And Christians gathered—or didn't—with their immediate families to worship.
- ▶ It would be misguided to suggest that such arrangements are not worship. Indeed, the psalmist says, "The heavens declare the glory of God," and the Lord himself says, "Where two or three gather in my name, there am I" (Ps. 19:1; Matt. 18:20). The instinct that God can be encountered in living rooms, in nature, and even on a TV is not wrong. The entire Christian tradition insists that God is not hindered by anything and can be near people through matter—even when conveyed by data packets to a screen. God indeed dwells with his people, gathered in homes across the world.

- ▶ Yet it would be incorrect also to call such a presence “church.” The church is not God’s guiding, consoling presence in one’s heart or the very real consolation and correction that can come when a group of Christians meets to pray. Nor is it what we name the occasional gathering of Christians to sing and study in homes or around tables worldwide.
- ▶ In the Bible, the concern of God in creating the church is not to form persons but to form a people. Abraham’s call was to be a blessing to the nations; David’s was to be a king of Israel, not simply a man after God’s own heart; and the judges convicted the sin of Israel’s leaders in order that the nation might be led into holiness.
- ▶ This pattern of God speaking to, instructing, and correcting discrete individuals for the service of a holy people is the story of God’s work among God’s people. All kinds of Christian gatherings and gatherings of Christians can be avenues for God’s gracious work among his people, yet not all of these gatherings are “church.”
- ▶ The main temptation in defining church is to instead articulate its ends. The wrong question that we are inclined to ask about church is why it matters. But it might not “matter” in the way we expect.
- ▶ The minute we ask why church “matters,” we are tempted to identify its concrete goods or its contribution to society.

Edmund Clowney (“Presbyterian Worship,” *Worship: Adoration and Action*, D. A. Carson, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 117), provides a succinct summary of the New Testament teaching, by precept and example, on what the elements of corporate worship are.

- ▶ Corporate prayer is offered (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 2:1; 1 Cor. 14:16)
- ▶ Scripture is read (1 Tim. 4:13; 1 Thess. 5:27; 2 Thess. 3:14; Col. 4:15-16; 2 Pet. 3:15-16)
- ▶ Scripture is expounded in preaching (1 Tim. 4:13; cf. Lk. 4:20; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 4:2)
- ▶ Gathering of the church (Acts 18:7, 11; cf. 19:8-10)
- ▶ Teaching of the Word is linked with table fellowship (Acts 2:42; 20:7; cf. vv. 20, 25, 28)
- ▶ Songs of the new covenant people both praise God and encourage one another (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:15; 1 Cor. 14:15, 26; cf. 1 Tim. 3:16; Rev. 5:9-13; 11:17f; 15:3-4)

- ▶ Giving to the poor is recognized as a spiritual service to God and a Christian form of “sacrifice” (2 Cor. 9:11-15; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 13:16)
- ▶ Reception and distribution of gifts is related to the office of deacon (Acts 6:1-6; Rom. 12:8, 13; cf. Acts 20:4; Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:19-21) and to the gathering of believers (Acts 2:42; 5:2; 1 Cor. 16:2)
- ▶ Faith is publicly confessed (1 Tim. 6:12; 1 Pet. 3:21; Heb. 13:15; cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-3)
- ▶ People receive God’s blessing (2 Cor. 13:14; Lk. 24:50; cf. Num. 6:22-27)
- ▶ Holy kiss of salutation is commanded (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14)
- ▶ People respond to praise and prayer with the saying of “Amen” (1 Cor. 14:16; Rev. 5:14; cf. Rom. 1:25; 9:5; Eph. 3:21; etc.)

► Sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are explicitly provided for -

- Confession is linked with baptism (1 Pet. 3:21)
- Prayer of thanksgiving is linked with the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:24)

Not all of these are done every time the people of God gather corporately. But they will all be included in the life of the church. Furthermore, most of them require a bodily, physical presence.

Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, [*The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything*](#) (Matthias Media, 2009), they concluded with a mental experiment about a pandemic.

Amazing!

- ▶ Imagine that the pandemic swept through your part of the world, and that all public assemblies of more than three people were banned. And let's say that, due to some catastrophic combination of local circumstances, this ban had to remain in place for 18 months.
- ▶ How would your congregation of 120 members continue to function—with no regular church gatherings of any kind, and no small home groups (except for groups the size of three)?
- ▶ If you were the pastor what would you do?

- ▶ I guess you could send your people regular letters and emails. You could make phone calls, and maybe even do a podcast. [The idea of livestreaming services didn't cross my mind in 2009!—TP] But how would the regular work of teaching and preaching and pastoring take place? How would you encourage your congregation to persevere in love and good deeds, especially in such trying circumstances? And what about evangelism? How would new people be reached, contacted and followed up? There could be no men's breakfasts, no coffee mornings, no evangelistic courses or outreach meetings. Nothing.
- ▶ You could, of course, revert to the ancient practice of visiting your congregation house-to-house, and doorknocking the local area to contact new people. But how, as a pastor, could you possibly meet with and teach all 120 adults in your congregation, let alone their children, let alone door-knock the entire suburb?

- ▶ No, if it was to be done, you would need help. You would need to start with ten of your most mature Christian men, and meet intensively with them two at a time for the first two months (while keeping in touch with everyone else by phone and email). You would train these ten in how to read the Bible and pray with one or two other people, and with children. Their job would then be twofold: to “pastor” their wives and families through regular Bible reading and prayer, and to each meet with four other men to train and encourage them to do the same. Assuming 80% of your congregation was married, then through these first ten men and those that they subsequently trained, most of the married adults would be involved in regular Bible-based encouragement.

- ▶ While that was getting going (with you offering phone and email support along the way), you might choose another bunch to train personally—people who could meet with singles, or people who had potential in door-knocking and evangelism, or people who would be good at following up new contacts.
- ▶ It would mean a lot of personal contact, and a lot of one-to-one meetings to fit in. But remember, there would be no services to run, no committees, no parish council, no seminars, no small groups, no working bees—in fact, no group activities or events of any kind to organize, administer, drum up support for, or attend. Just personal teaching and discipling, and training your people in turn to be disciple-makers.
- ▶ Now here's the question: after 18 months, when the ban was lifted and you were able to recommence Sunday gatherings and all the rest of the meetings and activities of church life, what would you do differently?

Communion: Celebrating As A Church Separately in Each Home

- ▶ How do we think about the church celebrating Communion as a church in absence, that is, online? I know there are differences of opinion on this, but this issue must be embedded in a question about the church, and this discussion, too, reflects a somewhat anemic ecclesiology, and a misunderstanding of how soteriology and ecclesiology organically fit together. It is also important to acknowledge that these are extraordinary times, which means we are engaged in extraordinary measures and means to continue to abide by and fulfill the commands of Scripture for the gathered body of Christ in local churches.

As you would surmise, there are variations in response, which is somewhat dependent on whether one is more high or low-church. Here are a few examples.

- ▶ Bobby Jamieson, [Can Baptism and the Lord's Supper Go Online?](#) (March 25, 2020)
- ▶ Bill Reidel, [Practicing the Ordinances in a Pandemic](#) (March 25, 2020)
- ▶ Ian Paul, [\(How\) can we celebrate Holy Communion as 'online' church?](#) (March 26, 2020)
- ▶ Chris Ridgeway, [Online Communion Can Still Be Sacramental](#) (March 27, 2020)
- ▶ Andrew Wilson, [Does Corona Mean Communion on Your Own?](#) (March 30, 2020)
- ▶ Scott Swain, [Should we live stream the Lord's Supper?](#) (March 30, 2020)

Jamieson is a Baptist, Reidel is EFCA, Paul is Anglican, Wilson is Charismatic, Swain is Reformed. I am not sure Ridgeway's denominational affiliation or theological views.

- ▶ Generally speaking, my concern is that many/most are simply engaging in Communion without thinking of the biblical and theological grounds behind their practice. It is approached more pragmatically without thinking a great deal about it theologically. That is to say, since this is what we do, then we ought to do it. But is it fitting to engage in the Lord's Supper virtually? This gets to the heart of the nature and function of the church as the people of God and how we understand and practice the ordinances.
- ▶ Because of our understanding of the nature of the church, and even though this is an extraordinary time (i.e., not ordinary) that requires engaging in some extraordinary means (i.e., not ordinary), I think this would be a step away, not a step toward our tangibly expressed oneness in Christ. In brief, I do not think we ought to celebrate the Lord's Supper/Communion virtually in absentia.
- ▶ So if I were a pastor of a church, I would not recommend that we participate in the Lord's Supper in this way until we meet together again, even though we are in extraordinary times. This is not the first time the church has experienced extraordinary times. And then, one of the longings after being apart as a church family would be to tangibly celebrate the Lord's Supper, reflective of our longing for Christ's return. This is, in fact, one of the truths we remember when we celebrate the Lord's Supper - that every time we corporately participate, we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

One of our pastor's captured the essence of my thoughts, which I include below in the three points, slightly edited.

1. It is not a sin, in an extraordinary time as this, to refrain from the practice of the Lord's Supper, just as it is not a sin to refrain from meeting as a local church at this time (Heb. 10:25 does not apply, because our not meeting is not due to willful neglect).
2. The Lord's Supper is a new covenant meal for the gathered church. It is best not practiced in isolation or outside of the regular corporate gathering.

3. The meal is intended to be not simply a feasting of the individual with God, but also a feasting with the body of Christ – a vertical and horizontal communion. We may take the meal with full confidence that we have by the Spirit the person of Christ (spiritual presence, i.e., Christ is “present” spiritually when we participate in genuine faith – this is grounded more broadly in Jesus’ promise that he is “with us” to the end of the age, and that we are “in Christ” which is our hope of glory), but we will not have the body, his church. In other words, the Lord’s Supper is to be celebrated corporately, the elements “visibly and tangibly express the gospel” (Article 7, The Church), and the corporately gathered people of God “manifest” the fruit of the gospel, and the two happen simultaneously. Paul certainly made a big deal to the Corinthians about waiting until all were present, and this must have come from his doctrine of the church. In our day and age, Christianity is already highly individualized. This moment can be one that reinforces the embodied nature of our Christian faith.

- ▶ This, then, also brings up the matter of how we view celebrating Communion with shut-ins or those who are permanently unable to attend the local corporate gathering of the church. I believe the Lord's Supper is a corporate meal, one we participate in in communion with others. Furthermore, as one of the ordinances, it is one of the marks of the true church, which means it is to be celebrated by the church. The other marks were the faithful preaching of the Word of God, the regular celebration of the ordinances, and church discipline (some conclude two marks, not three, subsuming discipline under the celebration of the ordinances).
- ▶ So, in the instance of celebrating Communion with a shut-in, I do not approach them individually apart from the church, but rather as a member of the church under the authority of the elders, under the authority of the congregation, under the Headship of Christ. They are not isolated individuals, i.e., only Christians. They are, rather, a Christian who is part of a larger body of Christ manifested in a local church.

- ▶ In these unique circumstances, an extraordinary situation brought about by ill health that prevents one from participating corporately with the body, the person's church family, we come on the church's behalf to one of the church's family members to remember the Lord Jesus' death on our behalf and our life in him, and as we engage in faith, we are strengthened. When we as a church come to the shut-in, we communicate and manifest that the Lord's Supper is more than a personal, spiritual matter, but also a covenantal and corporate matter.

THE CHURCH: PURITY AND UNITY



- ▶ **1 Corinthians 1:12-13:** “What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." **Is Christ divided?** Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”
- ▶ **1 Corinthians 11:18-19:** “For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are **divisions** among you. And I believe it in part, for **there must be factions** among you **in order that those who are genuine** among you may be recognized.”
- ▶ **Divisions:** of doctrinal differences and divided loyalties within a group schism, division of opinion, discord
- ▶ **Genuine:** as a qualification that results from trial and examination approved, reliable; substantively οἱ δόκιμοι the tried-and-true people (1C 11.19); (cf. Rom. 12:2, “prove” uses the noun form of the same root).
- ▶ [*Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve*](#), 4.3: “Thou shalt not desire a schism, but shalt reconcile those that strive.”

Novationism (3rd century):

- ▶ In this case, persecution occurred under Decius. This schism began as a debate over the proper treatment the church should accord to Christians who had denied their faith during times of persecution. “Questions arose as to how the church should deal with those who had purchased from a magistrate false certificates [*libelli*] affirming that they had offered a pagan sacrifice over against those who had actually performed the sacrifice – a practice in which even bishops had engaged. The Novationists maintained that only God might accord forgiveness for such grievous sin.” Those who did not purchase *libelli* were confessors. Tertullian, who represented another view, stated “salvation was impossible outside the communion of the church and that true penitents must be received back onto the fold as expeditiously as possible, while Novatian and his supporters maintained that the church must be preserved in its purity without the defilement of those who had not proved steadfast. They were later to go so far as to deny forgiveness for any serious offense (such as fornication or idolatry) after baptism, though pardon might be offered to those deemed near death.”



Libelli were certificates issued to Christians to affirm they conformed to the religious tests required by the edict of Decius. Those who purchased these certificates were called *libellatici*, a term of derision, or *lapsi* (“The regular designation in the third century for Christians who *relapsed* into heathenism, especially for those who during the persecutions displayed weakness in the face of torture, and denied the Faith by sacrificing to the heathen gods or by any other acts”). Generally, those lapsed were of three kinds: (1) apostates who had entirely abandoned the faith; (2) *sacrificati*, *thurificati* who had participated in the pagan rites; and (3) *libellatici* who had obtained certificates (*libelli*) of conformity from the proper civil authorities, and some actually had sacrificed while others only said they did.

Donatism (4th century):

- ▶ This arose in the wake of Diocletian's persecution (303-305) that was widespread in North Africa. "Donatism grew out of the teachings of Tertullian and Cyprian. Following these two, Donatists taught that a priest's part in sacraments was substantial (he had to be holy and in proper standing with the church for the sacrament to be valid) rather than simply instrumental. . . . To Donatus the church was a visible society of the elect separate from the world, whereas Augustine developed the Catholic concept of an invisible church within the visible." For Donatists, to pour a libation to the emperor or to surrender a Bible to Roman persecutors to burn was to be a heretic or a *traditore*. Any who had done so were forever outside the visible church unless they were rebaptized (being saved all over again). Augustine and others accepted *traditores* as they did any other backslider, and they were welcomed back into communion upon proper penance prescribed by their bishop. Donatists saw themselves as the only true church, and Augustine saw themselves as a mixed multitude.



Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020).

- ▶ There are “true churches” and “false churches”. Among true churches, there are *more pure* and *less pure* churches.
- ▶ This fact is evidence from a brief comparison of Paul’s epistles. When we look at Philippians or 1 Thessalonians, we find evidence of Pauls’ great joy in these churches and the relative absence of major doctrinal or moral problems (see Phil. 1:3-11; 4:10-16; 1 Thess. 1:2-10; 3:6-10; 2 Thess. 1:3-4; 2:13; cf. 2 Cor. 8:1-5). On the other hand, there were all sorts of serious doctrinal and moral problems in the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:6-9; 3:1-5) and Corinth (1 Cor. 3:1-4; 4:18-21; 5:1-2, 6; 6:1-8; 11:17-22; 14:20-23; 15:12; 2 Cor. 1:23-2:11; 11:3-5, 12-15; 12:20-13:10). Other examples could be given, but it should be clear that among true churches, there are *less pure* and *more pure churches*.

- ▶ **Purity of the church:** the purity of the church is its degree of freedom from wrong doctrine and conduct, and its degree of conformity to God's revealed will for the church.
- ▶ **Unity of the church:** the unity of the church is its degree of freedom from divisions among true Christians.
- ▶ We are obligated to work for both the purity and unity of the visible church.

- ▶ In the church, doctrinal **purity** and relational **unity**, are both essential. And there is an order. Doctrinal truth is the ground of relational unity, and relational unity is the fruit of doctrinal truth.
- ▶ The Holy Spirit applies the completed work of Christ to an individual bringing new birth, which is doctrinal truth/purity (Eph. 2:1-10), and the Holy Spirit through that new creation creates one new humanity (Eph. 2:11-22), reconciliation with God and with one another, which is relational unity.
- ▶ The new birth and oneness (unity) created by God (Eph. 2:14-16) we are to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (ESV) (“make every effort to keep” (NIV), “being diligent to preserve” (NASB), “endeavoring to keep” (NKJV)) (Eph. 4:1-3).

Signs of a More Pure Church (factors that make a church “more pure”)

- ▶ Biblical doctrine (or right preaching of the Word)
- ▶ Proper use of the sacraments (or ordinances)
- ▶ Right use of church discipline
- ▶ Genuine worship
- ▶ Effective prayer
- ▶ Effective witness

- ▶ Effective fellowship
- ▶ Biblical church government
- ▶ Spiritual power in ministry
- ▶ Personal holiness of life among members
- ▶ Care for the poor
- ▶ Love for Christ

Matthew 13:24-30: Jesus

- ▶ He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'""

Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of Love*, in [*A Christian View of the Church: The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer, vol. 4*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 193-94

- ▶ The Christian really has a double task.
- ▶ He has to practice both God's holiness and God's love. The Christian is to exhibit that God exists as the infinite-personal God; and then he is to exhibit simultaneously God's character of holiness and love.
- ▶ Not His holiness without His love: this is only harshness.
- ▶ Not His love without His holiness: that is only compromise.
- ▶ Anything that an individual Christian or Christian group does that fails to show the simultaneous balance of the holiness of God and the love of God presents to a watching world not a demonstration of the God who exists but a caricature of the God who exists.

- ▶ One of the most significant truths in relation to individuals from the Reformation is Martin Luther's phrase *simul justus et peccator*: at the same time righteous in Christ (justified) and sinners in themselves (Rom. 3:10-12; 4:1-8; 5:18-19; Gal. 2:16). It is a description of the believer who—because of the righteousness of Christ—is justified, even as the struggle against sin continues.
- ▶ One of the most significant truths about life as Christians in the church is remembering both the now and not-yet of the kingdom. In between the fall (Gen. 3) and the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21-22), there is both a now and a not-yet of the kingdom.
 - The now—the kingdom has come in/with the person and work of Jesus Christ, and we become citizens in this kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - The not-yet—the kingdom has not yet been ushered in fully and finally. We live in the present time and between the times. We live life in a redeemed-not-yet-glorified state.

Questions:

- ▶ What affects or impacts our understanding of both the purity of the church and the unity of the church? Generally, one will lean in one direction or the other (not denying the lean in the other direction). In what direction do you lean? Why? What about your church family?
- ▶ When we think in terms of purity and unity, which is important, what are the accompanying temptations? How does the notion of legalism or license affect or influence these temptations? How about one's own personal experience?
- ▶ What are some of the biggest threats to doctrinal purity today? What about relational unity?

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY



- ▶ I would begin with Wayne Grudem's treatment of the church in *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed., “Part 6: The Doctrine of the Church,” 1047-1340. He explains the different ecclesiological views, addressing both strengths and weaknesses of the different polities, while affirming congregational polity, recognizing both strengths and weaknesses of the view as well.
- ▶ I would also suggest Gregg R. Allison’s *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, “Part 6: The Doctrine of the Church,” 565-680. This is also helpful in that Allison looks at the doctrine of the church, beginning with a statement of belief and then addressing how it has been understood through different times in history, e.g., the early church, the Middle Ages, Reformation and Post-Reformation, and finally the Modern Period.
- ▶ You will notice, interestingly, that Grudem moves from the doctrine of union with Christ (chapter 43), the concluding chapter of Part 5: The Doctrine of the Application of Redemption, to the doctrine of the church (chapters 44-53).

Here are numerous other good works on the church, which are listed alphabetically according to last name.

- ▶ Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Foundations of Evangelical Theology). Cf. also Gregg R. Allison, *The Church: An Introduction* (Short Studies in Systematic Theology), ed. Graham A. Cole and Oren R. Martin.
- ▶ D. A. Carson, *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context*.
- ▶ D. A. Carson, ed., *The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study*.
- ▶ Edmund Clowney, *The Church* (Contours of Christian Theology).
- ▶ Edmond Clowney, "Church," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed., S. B. Ferguson, et al., 140-143.
- ▶ Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*.
- ▶ Mark Dever, "The Church," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel I. Kin, et al., 766-795, 809-815, 838-840.
- ▶ Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community: Where God's Power Makes a Church Attractive*.
- ▶ Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman, *Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ Is Essential*

- ▶ Megan Hill, *A Place to Belong: Learning to Love the Local Church*.
- ▶ Jay Y. Kim, *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age*.
- ▶ George Eldon Ladd, "The Kingdom and the Church," in *A Theology of the New Testament*.
- ▶ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*.
- ▶ Jonathan Leeman, *Understanding Church Discipline*.
- ▶ Jonathan Leeman, *The Rule of Love: How the Local Church Should Reflect God's Love and Authority*.
- ▶ P. T. O'Brien, "Church," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed., Gerald F. Hawthorne, et al., 123-131.
- ▶ D. J. Tidball, "Church," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity Diversity of Scripture*, ed., Brian S. Rosner, et al., 407-411.
- ▶ Stephen J. Wellum, "Beyond Mere Ecclesiology: The Church as God's New Covenant Community," in *The Community of Jesus: A Theology of the Church*, ed., Kendell H. Easley and Christopher W. Morgan, 183-212.

Ecclesiology: Polity

This list addresses the issue of polity, congregational government.

- ▶ Chad Brand, ed., *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004).
- ▶ Gerald P. Cowan, *Who Rules the Church?: Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003).
- ▶ Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Who Runs the Church?: 4 Views on Church Government*. Counterpoints: Church Life (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).
- ▶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), “Church Government,” (chapter 47), pp. 904-949.
- ▶ Andreas Kostenberger: “[The New Testament Pattern of Church Government](#)”

Ecclesiology: Elders and Deacons

This gets into the role of elder and deacon more broadly. What follows are some books I recommend, in alphabetical order, not in order of importance regarding the offices/roles of elders and deacons.

- ▶ Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).
- ▶ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016).
- ▶ Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders* (Chicago: Moody, 2003).
- ▶ Dave Harvey, *The Plurality Principle: How to Build and Maintain a Thriving Church Leadership Team* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021).
- ▶ Timothy J. Keller, *Resources for Deacons: Love Expressed through Mercy Ministries* (Christian Education and Publications [of the Presbyterian Church in America], 1985).
- ▶ Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).
- ▶ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).
- ▶ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).
- ▶ Jonathan Leeman, *Don't Fire Your Church Members: The Case for Congregationalism* (Nashville: B&H, 2016).

- ▶ Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2007).
- ▶ Benjamin Merkle, *Why Elders?: A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009).
- ▶ Benjamin Merkle and Thomas Schreiner, *Shepherding God's Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2014).
- ▶ Phil A. Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005).
- ▶ Phil A. Newton and Matt Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership*(Grand Rapids: Kregel Ministry, 2014).
- ▶ Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014).
- ▶ Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders: How to Shepherd God's People Like Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014).
- ▶ Greg R. Scharf and Arthur Kok, *The New Elder's Handbook: A Biblical Guide to Developing Faithful Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018).

- ▶ Matt Smethurst, *Deacons: How They Serve and Strengthen the Church* (9Marks Building Healthy Churches) (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021).
- ▶ PJ Smyth, *Elders: Developing Elders & Revitalizing Teams* (Advance, 2020).
- ▶ Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy* (Colorado Springs: Lewis & Roth, 1992).
- ▶ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Colorado Springs: Lewis and Roth, 1995).
- ▶ Alexander Strauch, *Meetings That Work: A Guide to Effective Elders' Meetings* (Colorado Springs: Lewis and Roth, 2001).
- ▶ Robert H. Thune, *Gospel Eldership: Equipping a New Generation of Servant Leaders* (New Growth Press, 2016).
- ▶ Paul David Tripp, *Lead: 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).

- ▶ Here is a good, brief article on [Advice for a New Elder](#)
- ▶ Here is a good, brief article on [Deacons are Shock Absorbers](#)
- ▶ And another on [The Role, Requirements, and Reward of a Deacon](#). Note at the conclusion of this article the author writes, “There is disagreement over whether the office of deacon is restricted to men only. Space does not allow me to outline the merits of each view. For that reason, I’ll refer to the office of deacon in a more generic way. But if you’d like to learn more about the merits of each view, check out *40 Questions about Elders or Deacons* by Benjamin Merkle or chapter 8 of *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches* by John Hammett.” Personally, I affirm a deaconate comprised of men and women, not men and their wives (though a husband and wife could serve as fellow deacons, I do not believe that is mandated. To the question, Tom Schreiner answers, [Yes](#), while Alexander Strauch answers, [No](#).

Getting a Vision for the Parachurch

- ▶ J. Mack Stiles, [Nine Marks of a Healthy Parachurch Ministry](#). A longtime parachurch veteran lays out nine things that should keep a parachurch ministry faithful to the gospel.
- ▶ Carl Trueman, [How Parachurch Ministries Go Off the Rails](#). Parachurch ministries often go wrong because they sideline important doctrines and lack proper accountability.
- ▶ Aaron Menikoff, [Are Parachurch Ministries Evil? Bad and Good Arguments for the Parachurch](#). This article critiques common arguments in favor of parachurch ministries; then it offers surer footing for their biblical legitimacy and practical usefulness.

Helping Church and Parachurch Work Together

- ▶ Brian Strider, [For the Parachurch: Know the Difference Between Families & Soccer Teams](#). Too many parachurch workers are only casually connected to a church. But this parachurch worker says they should reconsider this stance—for their good and the good of their ministries.
- ▶ Andy Johnson, [For the Church: Which Parachurch Ministries Should You Support?](#) Pastors are flooded with requests for parachurch support. Here are a few principles to help you decide whom to get behind.
- ▶ Jeramie Rinne, [For the Church: How Can You Support Parachurch Ministries?](#) How can the local church support parachurch ministries? This pastor says by attending to your church's health, by providing accountability, and by promoting their work.
- ▶ D. A. Carson, [Praying for Parachurch Ministries](#). A seasoned saint, scholar, and parachurch leader offers six reflections on praying for parachurch ministries.
- ▶ Jonathan Leeman, [How Church Discipline Will Save the Parachurch](#). Imagine what the evangelical landscape would look like if local churches did more to correct sin. Might the landscape become crowded with healthy parachurch ministries?

CONCLUDING REMINDERS



Ray Ortlund, [Gospel doctrine, gospel culture](#) (January 19, 2019): “Gospel doctrine creates a gospel culture. The doctrine of grace creates a culture of grace, as Jesus himself touches us through his truths. Without the doctrines, the culture alone is fragile. Without the culture, the doctrines alone appear pointless. But the New Testament binds doctrine and culture together. For example:”

- ▶ The doctrine of **regeneration** creates a culture of **humility** (Ephesians 2:1-9).
- ▶ The doctrine of **justification** creates a culture of **inclusion** (Galatians 2:11-16).
- ▶ The doctrine of **reconciliation** creates a culture of **peace** (Ephesians 2:14-16).

- ▶ The doctrine of **sanctification** creates a culture of **life** (Romans 6:20-23).
- ▶ The doctrine of **glorification** creates a culture of **hope** (Romans 5:2).
- ▶ The doctrine of **God** creates a culture of **honesty** (1 John 1:5-10).

- ▶ If we want this culture to thrive, we can't take doctrinal short cuts. If we want this doctrine to be credible, we can't downplay the culture. But churches where the doctrine and the culture converge as one bear living witness to the power of Jesus.
- ▶ Churches that do not exude humility, inclusion, peace, life, hope, and honesty—even if they have gospel doctrine on paper, they undercut their own doctrine at a functional level, where it should count in the lives of actual people. Churches that are haughty, exclusivistic, contentious, exhausted, past-oriented, and in denial are revealing not just a lack of niceness; they are revealing a gospel deficit, a doctrinal betrayal.
- ▶ The current rediscovery of the gospel as doctrine is good, very good. But a further discovery of the gospel as culture—the gospel embodied in community—will be immeasurably better, filled with a divine power such as we have not yet seen.

Listen to the words of Lesslie Newbigin who claims the church of God is “the only hermeneutic of the gospel.” (*The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 227).

- ▶ The primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation. How is it possible that the gospel should be credible that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? . . . *The only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.* (emphasis mine)

In commenting on this, Newbigin highlights six characteristics of what ought to be true of the church, this new community.

1. It will be a community of praise in a world of doubt and skepticism.
2. It will be a community of truth in a pluralist society that overwhelms and produces relativism.
3. It will be a selfless community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighborhood in a selfish world.

4. It will be a community prepared to live out the gospel in public life in a world that privatizes all religious claims.
5. It will be a community of mutual responsibility in a world of individualism.
6. It will be a community of hope in a world of pessimism and despair about the future.

Matthew 16:18-19: Jesus:

- ▶ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my **church**, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

1 Timothy 3:14-16: Paul:

- ▶ I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the **church** of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

Ephesians 3:20-21: Paul:

- ▶ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the **church** and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

